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Delivering A-1 Audio, And Making N

Al Siniscal Brings Some Of Life's Greatest Lessons To Sound Reinforcement

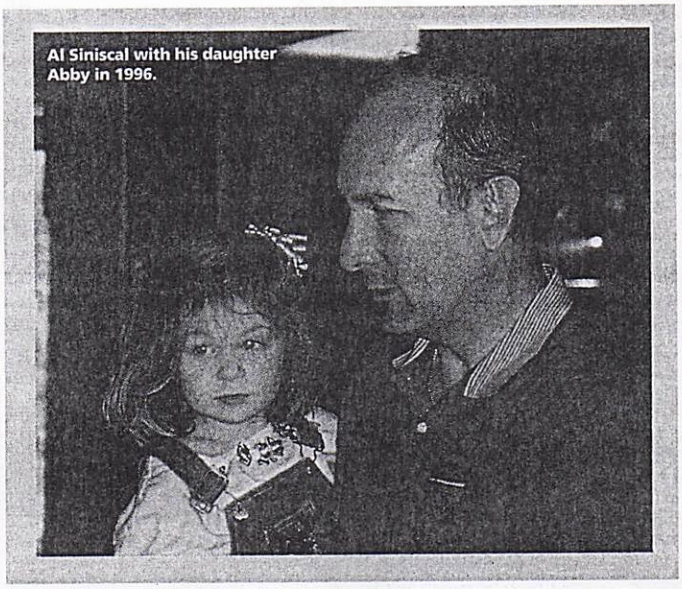
by Linda Romanello

Al Siniscal, founder and president of the West Coast's A-1 Audio, Inc., learned some valuable lessons early in life that he later applied to his own business and has continued to follow for more than 29 years.

As a first lieutenant engineer in the U.S. Air Force, where Siniscal received a significant amount of his engineering training, he says there was one phrase he was required to repeat. "Over and over again, it was 'No excuses, sir' and we'd then salute," he reflects. "In the Air Force, there are no excuses if you don't do your job properly, and somebody is killed."

Later, as an audio consultant for several hotels and performers in Las Vegas, Siniscal learned another important lesson from well-seasoned veteran entertainer Paul Anka. "He always used to say, 'The stakes are too high for amateurs.' That really stuck with me," explains Siniscal. "Really, what our mission is in the industry is to just do what we say we are going to do. I believe it's an issue of trust. You can't say that you'll be there or take care of something and then do nothing or only half a job."

Siniscal explains that these principles work well when running a business in the sound reinforcement, lighting, backline and production industry, all services that A-1 provides. "When a performer needs to be on stage at 8 o'clock," offers Siniscal as one example, "it doesn't mean 8:30 or 9. It means you are going to get them there and *on time*. It's not like working in a recording studio where you have two, three or 22 takes. You have only that one chance to do the job right, and it better be great."



Al Siniscal with his daughter Abby in 1996.

Siniscal's career in music began when he was a child—with dad as teacher, the whole family learned to play piano and was influenced by a variety of musical styles. "I grew up in a small town," says Siniscal, "and there was an engineering school nearby. So, we would often visit. I grew up learning about both engineering and music."

He later earned a bachelor's degree in engineering and an M.B.A. degree, both from Washington University in St. Louis. While attending classes, Siniscal worked at a local radio station that was on the university's campus. He later joined the Air Force and as 1st. Lt. engineer in the Missiles & Space System Division, he built what was one of the first audio control consoles, right on his kitchen table.

"In those days," he explains, "you couldn't buy an audio control console with modules. There just weren't any. They were all solid-panel design. So, I went and bought the resistors and some faders, and, with my training, built it in a way that you would if you were a military contractor. It had high reliability and gold flash connectors. I didn't know how to do it any other way."

It was during Siniscal's days in the Air Force that he had the opportunity to visit Las Vegas and see some of the shows. "One time, there was a situation where there was a big ground loop on stage that was causing a hum. The audience was watching, and the sound engineers were having trouble correcting the problem. So, I offered some advice, which solved the problem, and from that experience, my interest in becoming involved with sound and Vegas grew."

"I made some friends while I was in Vegas, and afterwards they were telling me how their equipment was breaking down, they were getting hums, etc. I introduced my audio control console along with a custom, powered speaker system to some of the audio engineers and performers like the Righteous Brothers and Paul Anka, and they loved it. It worked without failing. And, at that point, once one person heard about the console and powered speaker, a second became interested, and then I had to make two sets of them. Then, I had to make four, and it just grew from there."

"There have been lots of people who have tried it, but you can't just take a pile of money and expect to be an international sound and lighting company."

Today, A-1 Audio has $25 million in state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment, providing services for such acts as Aerosmith, Van Halen, Boyz II Men, Bush and Chicago with offices in Hollywood, Santa Monica, Las Vegas, Branson, New York, London and Lake Tahoe. A-1 provides its variety of services for touring, Broadway

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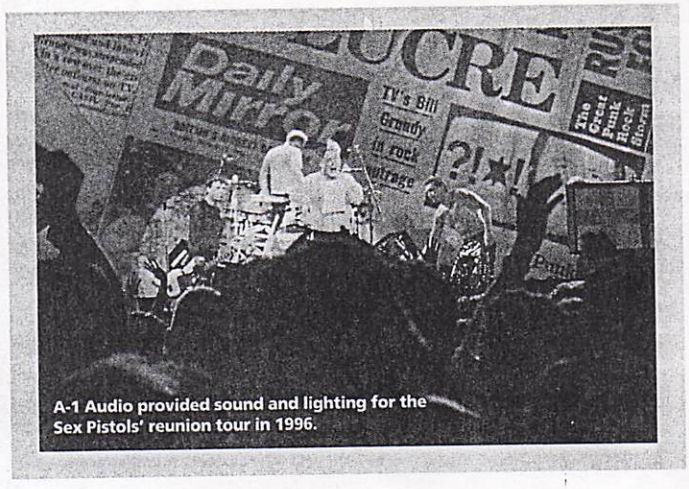
shows, television productions, industrial shows and many special events such as the opening of Disney's animated feature, *Hercules*, throughout Manhattan.

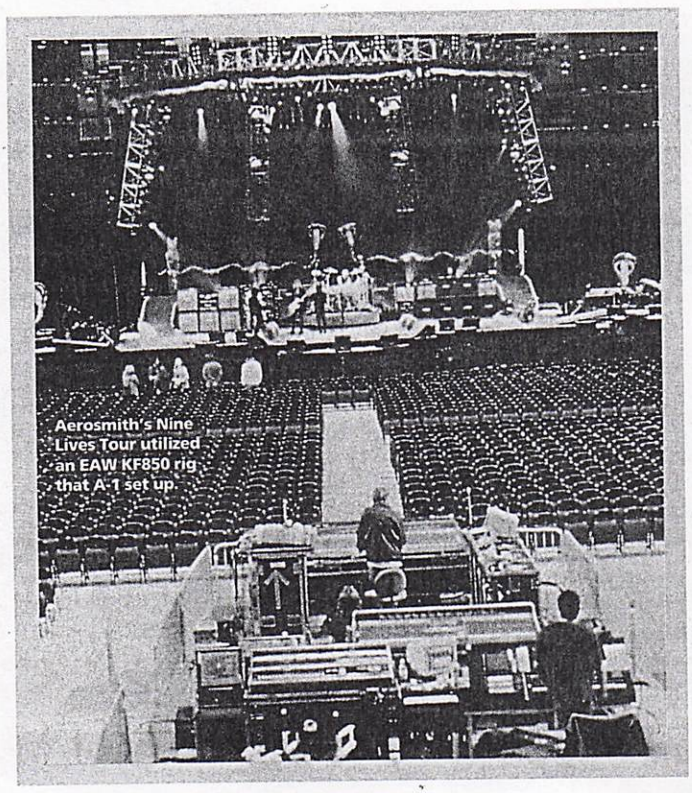
"When a West Coast company is called on to do a premiere in Manhattan, it certainly says something about the quality of your work," Siniscal says proudly. He adds, it is at events such as these that his "no excuses" policy works. "We can't be responsible for holding up a production for five minutes because there are a hundred other trade and technical people also working on that same project."

Siniscal works closely with his staff of close to 112 employees and independent engineers, and says that he is proud to be working with such a talented group of people. He notes that it is important in his business to be able to find bright, young people and teach them the same philosophies that A-1 has been following since its inception. "There are so many methods that we have developed over the years," he points out, "that are *not* available in books."

Together, Siniscal and his staff work to put together some of the best audio systems available today. "We use equipment from Meyer Sound Labs, EAW, JBL, Yamaha, AMEK and the digitally controlled L-Acoustic V-DOSC systems. We take this very high-end equipment to the next level. We integrate it so it can be properly used."



A-1 Audio provided sound and lighting for the Sex Pistols' reunion tour in 1996.


Aerosmith's Nine Lives tour utilized an EAW KF850 rig that A-1 set up.

Siniscal explains that every job can be divided into four parts: the design, the engineering, the fabrication and the install (which can be the actual tour or a physical, fixed installation). He points out that it is one thing to think about the design, but another to actually turn it into a reality.

"You can't just go out and spend a million dollars and expect to have a sound system or lights that work. There are so many tricks of the trade, so many proprietary ideas and so many parts that come from so many different manufacturers. It takes a huge amount of knowledge to be fully operational. There have been lots of people who have tried it, but you can't just take a pile of money and expect to be an international sound and lighting company."

Currently, Siniscal divides his time between the Las Vegas and Hollywood locations. Monday and Tuesday he is in Vegas, and Wednesday through Friday in Hollywood. "My family is in Vegas, so I spend weekends there, too." Siniscal says that his two children, an eight- and a five-year-old, are also learning to play piano. "We definitely all play music together just as I did when I was a child."

Siniscal says that he feels "blessed" that he has time for a family with the amount of hard work required to run a successful business in the audio engineering industry. He also adds that he feels very lucky to have two degrees, to be certified as a Registered Professional Electrical Engineer in both Nevada and California ("only about five percent of the engineers are registered"), and to have been fortunate to work with some of the biggest names in Vegas like Frank Sinatra, Barry Manilow, Johnny Mathis, Shirley MacLaine, Engelbert Humperdinck, Paul Anka and Wayne Newton.

"Working in Vegas was a wonderful training ground for many of our people here at A-1 Audio. Last week, I signed paychecks for 112 people. It's just a great feeling to see so much talent come together who understand what quality is and who understand that the stakes are too high for amateurs. We are here to do what we say we are going to do, and there are no excuses!"